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25 October 1965

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS WILL MAKE POSSIBLE THE
STRENGTHENING OF COMMUNIST FORCES IN
SOUTH VIETNAM AND SOUTHERN LAOS

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Research and Reports

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Research and Reports
25 October 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS WILL MAKE POSSIBLE THE
STRENGTHENING OF COMMUNIST FORCES IN
SOUTH VIETNAM AND SOUTHERN LAOS

1. Roads completed or under construction in the Laotian panhandle during 1965 will facilitate the movement of men and supplies to South Vietnam and will increase the ability of the Communists to deploy and support forces in Southern Laos. These roads in Laos are oriented to the east and south toward South Vietnam. (See map) Men and supplies can now be moved from the panhandle by a combination of truck and river transportation across the border of South Vietnam into an area 100 miles farther south than was possible prior to late 1964 or early 1965. A new road now in the final stages of construction, designated route 923, will eliminate the necessity for transfer from truck to river transportation and speed up movements to the south. Another new road also under construction, designated route 911, will reduce the distance from Mu Gia Pass to Tchepone by one-third and may provide an all-weather alternate to sections of dry-season routes 23 and 9. A newly constructed trail in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) provides a better connection between route 103 and route 9 near Tchepone and will also facilitate the flow of men and supplies through Laos towards South Vietnam.

The Transport Network Prior to 1965

2. The most important road for supplies moving from North Vietnam to the Communist forces in the panhandle of Laos and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam enters Laos at Mu Gia Pass. This route continues south on route 12 to the junction with route 23, down route 23 to route 9, along route 9, and thence south on route 92. Trucks move men and supplies from

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North Vietnam over this route during the dry season (December-June). Until late 1964 or early 1965 trucks could move only 25 miles south of Ban Dong to Muong Nong, at that time the end of route 92 and about 13 miles from the border of South Vietnam.

3. The other land route originated at the end of route 103 in North Vietnam and continued over a trail making an end-run of the DMZ. It connected with route 9 near Tchepone. Supplies for the Viet Cong then moved over route 9, down route 92 to Muong Nong and thence over trails into South Vietnam.*

Additions to Transport Network in 1965

4. Analysis of aerial photographs obtained during 1965 shows that important additions have been made to the road and trail network in the Laotian panhandle. Recent photographs show that a new route, designated number 911, is under construction between Ban Som Peng on route 23 and Ban Nabo on route 9. South of route 9 a whole new network of roads has been and is being constructed. This network begins at a point 15 miles south of route 9 on route 92, which was an old road leading south from route 9 to Muong Nong. From this point a new section of route 92 has been built, curving to the south for about 10 miles, then heading east for about 7 miles, and finally dropping south for another 37 miles to a vehicle turn-around at the Se Kong.

5. At a point about one mile south of the junction of the old and new sections of route 92, a jeepable trail, which appears on aerial photographs to be no more than 3 miles long and which has been designated route 921, has been built in a generally east-west direction across the new section of route 92. About 16 miles south of the junction with old route 92, another new road has been built as part of the network. This is route 922, which heads generally east to a point about 7 miles from the border of South Vietnam. Another important road in the new network is still under construction. This route, number 923, (not an official designation), leaves route 92 about 32 miles south of the junction of route 922, and snakes its way south and east for about 35 miles to a point within

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5 miles of Chavane on route 165. Route 923, except for the southernmost 5-mile section, appears to be in the final stages of construction. This road is important because it will make unnecessary both the transfer of goods from trucks to boats, which then move down the Se Kong, and the subsequent reloading onto trucks at routes 16 and 165 and an unnumbered route for further shipment east and south of the Se Kong. Route 16 winds south from Ban Phone, touching the Se Kong in two places. Route 165, which is the most southern road of the new network, leaves route 16 about 12 miles south of Ban Phone, crosses the Se Kong heading east for about 60 miles, where it expands into a little road net. (Not all of these roads are shown on the map.) The eastern fingers of three of these roads extend across the border into South Vietnam.

6. In addition to the roads discussed above, a new trail from the end of route 103 in the DMZ has been built and at least 10 bridges from 6 to 8 feet wide have been constructed between route 103 and the village of Ban Tchepone in the DMZ enabling bicycles, carts, and light vehicles to be used on the trail.

Significance of Additions to the Network

7. When route 923--now in the last stages of construction except for the small southern section--is completed, men and supplies can be moved during the dry season by truck from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. Furthermore, this truckable route crosses the border of South Vietnam, about 100 miles south of the end of the previously existing road and only 12 miles from South Vietnamese route 14.

8. The capacity of the supply route starting at Mu Gia Pass is limited by the amount that can come through the pass, so that construction of route 911 will not increase the capacity of this route. However, if route 911 is built so that it is truckable during the rainy season as well as the dry season, it will provide an all-weather road to the Tchepone area because it will bypass the section of route 23 that becomes impassable during

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the rainy season. Aerial photography is not available for about 17 miles of route 911, and about 12 miles of the route shown in photography have not been completed. It is estimated, however, that construction of both these sections can be completed in about 4 months, if, in fact, there are gaps totaling 29 miles. Aerial photographs show extensive scarring of the construction area which could mean that earth-moving vehicles are being used. If earth-moving vehicles are present, it would be further evidence of the importance which the Communists attach to the construction of this road. The construction of route 911 may also make interdiction of the supply route from North Vietnam more difficult by providing an alternate route for certain sections of routes 23 and 9. The construction of route 911 toward the south and east, and the construction of route 923, indicate Communist emphasis on activities in the area of the South Vietnamese border. If a drive by the Communist forces towards the west had been planned, the previously existing roads probably would have been sufficient.

9. At present, supplies moving south on route 92 must be transferred from truck to water transportation at the end of the road on the Se Kong and then reloaded on trucks where the river meets routes 16 or 165. The completion of route 923 would eliminate the necessity for this transfer and permit the use of trucks from North Vietnam through Laos into South Vietnam in the dry season.

10. The new trail built from route 103 to the village of Ban Tchepone in the DMZ is evidence that the Communists are planning to use this area more extensively than they have in the past. Aerial photographs show vehicle tracks and scarring at the end of route 103 and bicycles heading south about 5 miles north of the new trail. This new trail connects with the old trail leading to the town of Tchepone in Laos on route 9, so that men and supplies can continue to move toward South Vietnam over routes 9 and 92 and connecting roads.

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